

BETWEEN THE SPECIES

Shared Responsibility in a Multi-Species Playground

ABSTRACT

While conducting research on urbanised hyenas in Harar, Ethiopia, I was approached by a young hyena named Willi. In contrast to other hyenas, who tolerated my presence but otherwise had little interest in me, Willi insisted on some kind of engagement. Through biting, chase play, combing, following and standing by one other, Willi and I went beyond our species limitations and created an improvised intersubjectivity based on a will to understand. However, our friendship led to some harmful consequences for which I felt responsible. This led me to question the ethics of engagement with non-humans: if unforeseen harms can result from this kind of friendship, then is it better to keep animals at a safe distance? In the end, I argue that the solution is a deeper engagement, from which we might recognise the capacities of non-humans as agents and learn how to act responsibly in the presence of Others.

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From September 2009 until April 2011, I was conducting fieldwork in the town of Harar in northeast Ethiopia. Harar's Old Town is encircled by a 500 year-old stone wall which is punctuated by gates and smaller 'hyena holes' through which free-ranging spotted hyenas pass each evening as they patrol the streets looking for scraps of food. There is also a feeding place just outside the town wall where a man named Yusuf feeds meat scraps to hyenas every night, deriving an income from tourists who come to see the spectacle. In the course of my fieldwork I set about the process of habituating hyenas to my presence. I spent my nights on the hill behind the feeding place or on the side of the road opposite one of the hyena holes in the town wall. At the latter place, I normally sat on a rock pile, waiting for hyenas to pass by. If one passed who was sufficiently habituated then I followed him or her in the hope that they made a foray into the Old Town. More often than not they became frightened by people coming out of the town and resorted to running down the road towards the garbage dump. I had made some observations of a young hyena that Yusuf called Willi. On a few occasions he approached people but was inevitably frightened off and appeared unsure of what it was he should be doing. However, he seemed willing to learn by trial and error on the off chance that eventually some food would come out of it.

I went around the front of Yusuf's house and found Willi lying down. So I sat on the rock pile and spoke to him. To my surprise, he came over and began sniffing me. I stayed still. He sniffed my flashlight, my hands, and my knees. I tried to pat him but he shied away from my hand. Then while he was sniffing my knee, he opened his mouth and was about to take a bite, using the side of his mouth, the way a hyena eats a bone.

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I pulled my knee away and reprimanded him, telling him I wasn't food. He went and sat and washed himself (Field notes, March 2010).

On subsequent nights, I frequently encountered Willi on the hill or on the road near to the rock pile. He was quite interested in me, always coming over to investigate, and he teamed up with another precocious hyena named Baby whereupon they sniffed me together.

I was sitting at the bottom of the hill, with my back to the fence and I could see Willi and Baby play-biting near the dumpster. They started a chase and Willi took off with Baby in pursuit. Willi led Baby across the hill and down onto the dirt road and then back towards the fence. Every now and then Baby caught him and did some biting, then Willi broke free and the chase continued. At one point Willi ran straight for me and then turned about a meter in front of me. He ran down to the dirt road and then ran back and again stopped in front of me. Baby joined him and they sniffed me. Willi play-bit my knee and I had to stand to fend him off. Then he kept at me and it was all I could do to stop him biting me. I trotted over to the deserted feeding place to call to Yusuf's son out of the house to come and see but by that time Baby had resumed the chase. I joined in, feigning attempts to catch Willi which he dodged, but differently to the way hyenas normally avoid humans. No sign of fear. We ended up on the slope of the hill where I sat on my heels and Willi and Baby came at me, trying to get behind. I turned and tried to grab them and they jumped out of the way. Then another juvenile, who I could not recognize in the dark, chased

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after Willi. Baby joined in and they went down onto the dirt road. Every now and again Willi broke off and came to me and I tried to grab him, or Baby. The play fizzled out when Baby wandered off in search of the source of a smell and the others settled down beside the track (Field notes, March 2010).

The habituation process was taking an unusual direction in which these two hyenas refused to allow me to be invisible and instead insisted on some kind of engagement. I might have tried to shoo them off—hyenas in Harar readily scatter when humans make aggressive moves—and indeed that may have been the correct response under the ethics guidelines of my research. However, when one is amidst the unfolding of research, refusal of play feels like exerting control over the relationship (and also over the data I was collecting). It seemed the right thing to do ethically and methodologically, but it also felt very natural to respond to the invitation; it triggered something in me as a mammal. I could argue, that based on the events of that night of play, Willi was suitably habituated as he was certainly not adversely disturbed by my presence. But it transpired that he was probably more profoundly affected by my presence than any of the other hyenas.

I went to the back of the compound, just out of the light when Willi came trotting over. I squatted and he sniffed me and my night vision scope, my umbrella and my knees. I reassured him it was ok, then reached out and touched him. He sniffed more and I rubbed his head. Once he was sure I wasn't going to hurt him, I found I could pat his head and ruffle his fur. I called to Yusuf's son to come and see and he came out and was amazed. He called the whole family out and they watched. That

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was when Willi bit my sleeve, but very gently so that when I looked for tooth marks, there were none. He was trying to bite quite a bit and it took some getting used to (Field notes, March 2010).

Paul Shepard related a story of watching two hawks playing above him: one dropped a piece of lichen to the other below who caught the lichen and flew up so that it could drop the lichen to the first. It transpired that one of the hawks dropped the lichen to Shepard whose later retelling of the story met with a derisive snort from an ornithologist who turned and left. Shepard referred to this as the “yearning for a sign from the Others and a skepticism that it is possible” (1996, 141). I was consumed by both and constantly questioned what it was that Willi was after. Was he hoping for food, displacing aggression or was he too, yearning for a sign from the Other? Did he think that the fair skinned tourists he encountered at the feeding place tore strips of their own flesh from their bodies to feed to hyenas and that I might do the same? Or that he could save me the effort and tear the flesh from my arm himself? These are valid questions; while hyenas are highly social and Willi might have been including me in his social sphere, they are also very curious and versatile in their food preferences so it makes sense for them to test anything and everything to find out if it is edible. As such I considered that in Willi’s eyes, I could have been little more than a convenient object upon which to strengthen his jaw muscles.

On subsequent nights, Willi’s biting became more persistent. Hans Kruuk (1972, 250) noted a similar behavior in his tame hyena, Solomon, who had a propensity to bite peoples’ legs but which subsided after he was nine to eleven months old. Willi must have been a year old but he showed no inclination to

cease his biting. Thus, while I let him bite and tear at my jacket sleeve, I resolved to find him something other than my person to chew on. At the time, consumable goods for dogs, including toys, were non-existent in Harar so I went to the market, looking for something chewable yet resilient, long enough to keep my hand from his mouth, and inexpensive. I ended up purchasing a long handled plastic comb and brought it with me to the hyena feeding place.

I introduced Willi to the comb and he took to it straight away. He loved chewing on the end and breaking off the teeth and it was only minutes before a couple were chewed off. He also tried to get further down the handle to where my hand was but I managed to keep him focused on the end. Then after he'd finished, and the comb was covered in hyena slobber, not wanting to have a pocket full of hyena saliva, I wiped it on his fur to clean it. Then it suddenly occurred to me to use the comb for the purpose that its makers had intended. I started combing Willi's fur (blog posting, April 2010).

The more time I spend with hyenas, the more I appreciate the ways in which they differ from humans. It is especially so with how they use their bodies socially. While a human might use touching, eye contact, and conversation to interact socially, hyenas prioritize other parts of their bodies including their noses, mouths, and genitals. While the use of the nose and genitals has been described in detail elsewhere (see for example East, Hofer and Wickler 1993, 356; Kruuk 1972, 226–7), the use of the mouth is of interest here in relation to Willi's biting attempts. A hyena's mouth is a main point of contact with other hyenas: in nuzzle wrestling where a hyena presses its open mouth sideways against another's neck; in greeting where a hyena opens

its mouth to allow another to insert its snout and discover what it has been eating; and in play. Hyenas have very tough skin (Kruuk 1972, 224) so that when they play, they bite very hard, taking a mass of their playmate's skin in their teeth and pulling and tugging. If the playmate is standing, the hyena bites the tail, leg or the skin of the neck and tries to pull the playmate to the ground. Once the playing hyenas are on the ground the biting continues as the two, or more, hyenas try to get a better grip on one another. It is reminiscent of a hyena trying to tear apart a wildebeest, however it is unmistakably play and the recipient tolerates (what seems to me) quite severe biting before its tolerance gives way and it utters a soft croak, indicating that the biting has gone too far.

In hindsight I think that Willi's biting was primarily an effort directed at engaging with me through initiation of play. I became even more convinced later with the help of Baby and another hyena named Kamareya when the three involved me in chases around the hill behind the feeding place. On all but one occasion Willi was the one who broke from the group and came over to where I was making observations and initiated play with me, effectively inviting me to join in. And in all of that, I noticed that Willi played differently to the other hyenas. Baby and Kamareya normally circled around me and tried to get behind as they were understandably wary of presenting themselves front on to a human; even one who appeared unthreatening to them. It was reminiscent of Kruuk's (1972, 50) account of hyenas playing/hunting with a rhino. Willi, on the other hand, simply walked right up and started biting.

At Yusuf's, I was sitting with Willi on the hill and a carload of tourists arrived in the drive. The other hyenas got up and trotted past to go feed and Willi casu-

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ally got up, had a stretch, and walked past me towards the feeding place. But as he walked past, he bit my shoulder and continued on. I said, 'Hey!' and stood up and he was looking back at me with his tail between his legs. He let me catch up and I smacked him on the rump (blog posting, August 2010).

While hyenas are not given to the kind of affection we are accustomed to seeing in felids, within the bounds of potential of hyena/human relations, Willi and I became very close. On some nights on the hill I sought him out and sat close by, and on others, he sought me out. Then when Willi began making forays into the Old Town I accompanied him on some of those journeys. I gained an understanding of the degree to which human beings are feared by hyenas as well as the unlimited patience of a hyena in the face of harassment from people and dogs. Willi entirely accepted my presence when he was on his wanderings of the laneways of the Old Town and even in some circumstances followed me so that I often had the feeling we were exploring together. On some nights, I met up with Willi in the Old Town when I was on my way to a hyena hole. In the darkness, hyenas always recognized me before I recognized them and Willi was especially familiar with my appearance and footsteps. He stood and watched as I approached and then we went off together.

Outside the gate at Argobberi, Willi cut across the common (to avoid a dog who was lying in the middle of the road) and went up to Aw Warika. On the right he investigated a compound and then continued up to where some cattle were being taken off a truck. Having seen those, he went and investigated the new landscaping at Aw Warika. He came out and went back into the com-

pound across the road then dropped into the drain on the Old Town side of the road. After sniffing around in there he jumped back out and we went to Argobberi. The dog, who was lying on the road, got up and chased Willi down onto the reserve beside the wall. I lost my patience, ran down and chased the dog away. At this Willi came up beside me with his tail out, and we stood together, glaring at the dog. Then the dog went to one side and Willi and I went after it (Field notes, June 2010).

It was not lost on me that chasing dogs was outside of the gist of the ethics that were guiding my research but it was one o'clock in the morning, I had been following Willi for three hours, and I was deeply absorbed in the world of a hyena. What is interesting for me in hindsight is that when I went charging down towards Willi and the dog at the reserve, Willi actually came towards me. That was very much contrary to the typical behavior of Harar hyenas whose immediate and instinctive reaction to the stamping feet of running humans is to run in the opposite direction and assess the humans' intentions from a safe distance. Willi was demonstrating first that he knew to whom I was directing my aggression and second, that he trusted that I would to stand by him in an altercation with a dog.

After some time the hyenas turned to head home and so did Willi, with me following. At the first farm, Willi stopped and pasted on a grass blade. He kept coming over to me as we went and he led me over the farmland and down to a creek crossing. It was an irrigation canal over the creek. Willi hesitated at the bridge and went up into some bushes. He was nervous. I reassured him and waited by the bridge and when he came to cross,

a farmer appeared at the top of the gully and headed down to the bridge. Willi was already off and running up the creek. After the farmer had passed (I said hello to him) I crossed and met Willi coming towards me from where he'd disappeared into the forest. He came over, had a little bite and then as we went he kept turning and looking at me and then cantering but he wasn't trying to lose me because he kept stopping and approaching me. He led me down to a narrow, sandy channel with some branches across it and went beneath those so I let him go. But then he came back towards me and under the branches, one of which fell and frightened him. He sniffed at the branch and looked at me. Willi waited as I climbed over the branches and followed him down through a banana farm and this is where the entrance to his den was. He went into the gap in the reeds while I sat on the bank and I heard some movement within. Then he came back and appeared at the entrance. He came up to me and I gave him a cornstalk to bite, whereupon we had a tug of war and he took the cornstalk with him to the entrance. Again he went in and, again came back out to me. I told him it was too small for me and he went in again and didn't reappear. I heard a little movement but that was all; I presume his den is very near the entrance in the reeds. There was also a latrine very near to the entrance (Field notes, January 2011).

While I was very much tempted to follow Willi into the den, I had to refrain as there might have been other hyenas and young cubs present that would not have been as comfortable as Willi with my appearance in their den. I have no doubt Willi was expecting me to visit his den, an activity described by Jane

Goodall in her study in Ngorogoro crater in Tanzania, where young hyenas visited others at their dens and spent a few days or nights there before returning to their own dens (van Lawick-Goodall and van Lawick-Goodall 1970, 161).

Barbara Smuts (2001, 306) rendered a list of seven levels of inter-subjective experience between humans and animals, and it correlates stepwise with the unfolding of Willi's relationship with me. At the most basic level, an animal responds to a human in an instinctive, almost formulaic way. This is typical of hyenas that react fearfully to humans prior to gauging the human's intentions. At the second level the animal attempts to gauge the intentions of the human. At the third level, there is recognition and the animal responds differently to the individual as compared to the species. The fourth level involves communication and attempts to interpret each others' behaviors. The fifth level is reached when both parties establish a mutually beneficial relationship. The sixth level is a relationship for its own sake. The seventh is where the degree of intimacy is such that the subjective identities of the individuals are merged. I am not entirely sure that our identities merged; perhaps when we stood side by side in confrontation with the dog. But I do think that our relationship was beyond mutual benefit and sustained for its own sake.

But how is it that two members of different species with quite different means of social interaction can engage at an inter-subjective level to which mutual understanding is so profound? Jacob Von Uexküll's (1982) Theory of Meaning is helpful here. Inter-subjectivity is made possible between species—specifically human and hyena—because we are adapted to include the other in our world. As the web that a spider spins—and by extension the spider itself—must be fly-like

(Von Uexküll 1982, 43), so too there is something in the human that is hyena-like. Indeed, according to Kruuk (1975, 8), our shared evolutionary history, mammalian relatedness and our ancestors' converging ecological niches make it relatively easy for us to imagine hyenas' worlds. Willi and I had set aside some of our species-typical, conventional forms of interaction and reached out towards more challenging but somehow familiar kinds of inter-subjective experience. In this realm of merging surround worlds, we opened up a "hybrid dialogue" of improvised communication and understanding (Despret 2004, 122). Willi chewed on my sleeve, I spoke in a soft voice; he stood and waited; I followed; or else I encouraged and he followed; he invited, I played; I combed, he lifted his chin. In following Willi, engaging in play, seeing the world through his eyes, I was drawing on our evolutionary relatedness and becoming human-like-hyena; expanding the scope of my surround world to include hyena subjectivity. I was gaining insights, the like of which no radio collars, camera traps, or fecal samples could ever provide. I realized how dead livestock could be so utterly desirable, how humans could be so terrifying, how a steaming mound of garbage held such enticing potential, and how the rising of the sun brought with it an irresistible imperative to return home. However, inter-subjectivity, by definition, transcends the observer-observed relationship. The effects run in both directions and Willi was also privy to how I saw my world and this led to some unexpected problems.

When I returned to Ethiopia after a three-month break in Australia, I knew Willi was still alive as I had been in contact with Yusuf's family by phone. However, I was surprised to learn that, a few days before my return, Willi had bitten Yusuf's son, Abbas. Apparently Abbas was sitting on a rock, feeding the hyenas in front of some tourists whereupon Willi

approached unnoticed from behind and bit him on the neck. Abbas was not fazed by the bite; he simply took some antibiotics so that it healed without infection. It was disturbing to me, however, because that kind of thing had never happened before at the feeding place. Yusuf had once been bitten on the hand and dragged several meters by a hyena but that hyena was not attempting to bite him; rather it thought that it had bitten a piece of meat in Yusuf's hand and was having a tug of war. In Abbas's case, Willi had very deliberately walked up and bitten him on the neck.

As I said above, hyenas are very attentive animals and one should never underestimate what is going on inside those heavily muscled heads. Night after night Willi had seen me sitting and joking with Abbas. Consequently, it was later a small matter to convince him to stay put while Abbas approached and participated in combing him, even though Willi had previously been afraid of Yusuf's son. In fact Willi paid very close attention to everyone with whom I was interacting. After my wife had accompanied me to the feeding over four consecutive nights, Willi approached her and insisted on becoming acquainted, sniffing her knee while she, to her credit, held her nerve and allowed him. That was highly unusual behavior for Willi to exhibit towards a relative stranger. Then when a hyena-researcher friend from Kenya came to visit, I went over to where Willi was lying in the darkness and called my friend over, whereupon Willi remained on the ground and permitted her to comb under his chin. That is something he would never have allowed had I not been showing him that the stranger was not a threat. Willi was basing his judgments about other people on how he perceived their relations with me, and I could not shake the feeling that that was what underlay his biting Abbas.

And then there was Fintamurey, the offspring of the high-ranking Koti. On my return to Harar, Fintamurey had already begun feeding at Yusuf's. Having seen Willi playing with me on a few occasions, she had no difficulty accepting that I was not a threat and began trying to play with me as well. However, she played in a different fashion to Willi where her behavior was more akin to the hunting/play described above, rather than the direct biting and holding that typified Willi's play. Fintamurey became very audacious and constantly tried to get behind me and bite so that at times I had to stand up and go over to the shrine to get away from her. Then one night when I was sitting at the shrine, both Fintamurey and Willi insisted on putting their snouts in my crotch so that I had to physically lift them by their necks and shove them away. It was one of the few times that I felt threatened by hyenas in Harar.

Subsequently, Fintamurey and Willi became very bold in their approaches towards Yusuf. At first, Yusuf found it amusing that he could pat their heads when they came to feed and he even tickled Willi under his chin with the feeding stick. But then the two young hyenas became so bold as to stand right before him with their heads in the feed bucket making it all but impossible for Yusuf to put his hand in to draw out a meat scrap without the risk of his hand being bitten. Hence, where previously he had simply held out bits of meat to wary hyenas and called their names, he was now spending a great deal of time pushing Willi and Fintamurey away from the feed bucket and saying '*Achi dem, Achi dem!*' (Get away, get away!).

And then there was Dibbey. Of all the named Sofi hyenas, Dibbey was the one who was most easily recognizable from demeanor alone. She normally arrived at the feeding place, with her mouth open and her tail erect, chasing other hyenas away

from Yusuf and causing a lot of disturbance. While Dibbey was very tolerant of my presence on the hill and often came and lay down close to me, she was very often aggressive towards Willi when he was near me. I did not understand why—perhaps she thought that his close proximity to me meant that he was somehow obtaining food—but on several occasions when Willi and I were together, Dibbey walked straight towards Willi and displaced him by holding her head low and aiming her snout at him while she approached. At such times, Willi quite sensibly got up and moved away. Consequently, it was no surprise, when I arrived in Harar after my second visit, to find out that Dibbey had bitten Willi on the rump, leaving a large, open wound. After that incident, Willi was terrified of Dibbey. He constantly circled around Yusuf so that the hyena man was always between himself and the aggressive female and only occasionally managed to get a bit of food. I looked on and wondered, not only about how my relationship with Willi might have adversely affected the way he interacted with humans but also about how it may have affected the way that hyenas, particularly Dibbey, acted towards him. Abbas being bitten, Willi's and Fintamurey's audacity towards people, Yusuf's problems feeding, and Dibbey's attack on Willi all seemed to have stemmed from my own actions in establishing a relationship with Willi. The responsibility weighed heavily on my shoulders.

In Despret's (2006) account of the work of ethologist Thelma Rowell, she describes how Rowell provided 23 bowls of food for the 22 sheep that she was studying (2006, 361). The reason for the extra bowl: it opened up the field to new possibilities; it gave the sheep the opportunity to do unexpected things. According to Despret, the biological sciences do not normally give their objects of study the opportunity to do interesting things, nor do researchers acknowledge their own

presences and the ways in which animals take advantage of those (2006, 362). Animals (other than primates) are not usually allowed to have subjective lives and are not allowed to interact with researchers. They do not have personalities, they have “behavioral syndromes,” they do not have friends they have “alliance partners,” they do not have lovers, they have “mates” (see for example Sih et al. 2004, 242; Zabel et al. 1992, 114). In those terms, Willi had been given an extra bowl. His mother had brought him to the feeding place where the hyena feeding was engendering close proximity of humans to hyenas. And just beside the road, near to the feeding place, there I sat with my notebook. Willi gave in to his curiosity and took the opportunity to include me as a prominent element in his world whereupon I responded in kind. Yet, having taken stock of the outcomes, I still felt compelled to take responsibility for what had happened as a result of a mutual coming together. And in doing so, I had reverted to the very ethical distinctions that at the outset of my research I had wanted to blur: the distinctions between humans as subjects and animals as objects in the landscape; objects that can be relocated, radio collared, trapped, or euthanized.

I cannot take full responsibility for the harms that were done because I was never in control. Willi and I were both novices following paths that were unfolding before us. We had broken with the conventions of hyena-human interaction in Harar and some very interesting things had happened but I held very little sway over what was happening. While I may have felt god-like when I was planning my fieldwork and looking down on Harar from an all-seeing view provided by satellite imagery, by the time I was on the ground, things were quite different. Whereas hyenas and researchers are normally separated by the outer shells of four-wheel-drive vehicles, I was compelled by

the landscape and my limited budget to be with the hyenas at ground level. The decision to habituate hyenas from on foot was effectively made for me by the circumstances. When Willi approached me, I did not drive him away but I followed my curiosity and my “yearning for a sign from the Other.” As such, neither of us was outside of the process and in a position to dictate the outcomes. Of course inter-subjectivity does not automatically entail equality (Haraway 2003, 41) and I recognize the potential power that I had over Willi and his actions (although I suspect Willi considered he was in charge). However, an inter-subjectivity in which the Other is objectified is a contradiction in terms. I find that I am ethically obliged to apportion some of the responsibility to Willi.

As such, I think I should ask whether engagement is indeed a viable way forward for the study of animal Others as subjects. In advancing new ways in which to conceive of relations with the environment, Ingold (2000, 76) called for an attentive regard, a “being with” animals. Wapner (2010, 166) recommended engaging wildness specifically to cultivate relationships between ourselves and animal Others. Sanders and Arluke (1993, 378) argued that capturing the subjective experience of animals required the investigator be “intimately involved” with the Other. But if we cannot control the outcomes, then should we continue in that direction, knowing that the outcomes may be harmful? Where human researchers can transmit diseases, diminish animals’ healthy fears of humans, or engender social disruption, I am led to wonder about the viability of the inter-subjective approach. Paul Shepard, who also advocated engagement with non-human Others, who was also yearning for a sign, would have disapproved of the kind of engagement that characterized my encounters with Willi but on grounds other than those mentioned above. Shepard decried the idea of a ‘Disneyish’ frat-

ernization with animals, suggesting it was symptomatic of the neurosis of humans in industrialized societies who were disconnected from wild animals (1996, 290). He was adamant: “Wild animals are not our friends” (1993, 288). As such, recreating a peaceable kingdom on Earth was but a step towards projecting the domestic world onto wild nature. The only outcome he foresaw in that was the imposition of human “moral eminence” over the Others and a greater disconnection of humans from animals (1993, 288). For Shepard, social engagement with non-humans was psychologically harmful for humans. Shepard’s conception of engagement with animals entailed simply observing them at a distance, symbolizing them as a part of our personal development, ingesting them as food, and paying attention to their anatomies (1993, 320). He argued that this was where hunter/gatherer people drew the line.

In answer to the problem of habituation and subsequent harms, I argue that engagement is a potential solution to those problems, but that it needs to be employed across the board. Note that all of the harms that I believed resulted from my engagement with Willi were related to feeding. Indeed it was due to the hyena feeding that Willi was first motivated to approach people and eventually engage with me. Taking engagement as a given, it was during feeding that Willi bit Abbas on the neck. It was also at the feeding place that Willi and Fintamurey were causing problems for Yusuf and where Dibbey attacked Willi. However, it was only at the feeding place where the atmosphere was so highly charged among the Sofi hyenas. There were minor squabbles at the garbage dump and occasional conflicts over found carcasses, but only at the feeding place was the nervous energy and competitive tension at extreme levels. In fact it is a credit to the majority of hyenas that they were able to contain themselves and refrain from attacking others (includ-

ing people) the majority of the time. I can only know about this by having engaged with Willi and other hyenas in a number of different circumstances and in different places. Consequently I think that engagement towards inter-subjectivity is a way forward in understanding and mitigating harm towards animals. Only by knowing the Others as familiars, can we begin to see how they perceive their worlds.

Finally, I should address the views of Paul Shepard, if only to placate his spirit after I crossed the boundary between species and made friends with a hyena. If we humans are to reconceptualize ourselves as ecologically related to animals, we must acknowledge the possibility of encounters with Others as subjects. This is not a wistful desire for a Disneyish forest of round-eyed creatures prancing and flitting about a human idol; this is a recognition that Others will act according to their wills, and sometimes those Others will want to engage, socially with us. As such, to turn away from an individual like Willi would be a denial of his subjectivity and a disregard of our ecological relatedness. Of course, engagement will involve risks; making friends with someone always does. But the harm that has been inflicted on animals as a consequence of humans having disengaged themselves is a matter of historical record, which I need not detail here. Neither are relationships with other species strictly human affectations. Hyenas play with rhinos; wolves with ravens; chimps with baboons (Goodall 1988, 164; Kruuk 1972, 250; Lopez 1978, 68). These kinds of relationships are all fraught with danger; one day a playmate might become a predator. The point is that we can immerse ourselves in the world of animals as more than observers, hunters, scavengers, and prey. We can learn from other species and find new ways to conceive of our worlds. What is more, our boisterous, primate sociability

and attentive regard for the intentions of others makes us excellent, albeit irascible, playmates.

Human-animal interactions are always double-sided (Servais 2005, 211). Willi was not an object upon which I was acting. Instead he was improvising and following a different trajectory to the other hyenas; a trajectory for which he, as an agent, was responsible. In light of that, I asked here: is engagement possible without causing harm? I think the answer is yes because it leads to recognition of the subjectivity of Others. From that recognition we will see better what they are capable of. In which case we need to see ourselves as immersed in the animal kingdom, as Shepard (1996, 269) entreated, and accept the possibility of inter-subjectivity, not distance ourselves from the Others out of a desire to take control over their lives. That was the lesson I was given by a spotted hyena named Willi.

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